

ANNOUNCING SBA's VERMONT 2008 SMALL BUSINESS WINNERS



Sharon Gutwin

For years, Sharon Gutwin dreamed of consolidating the physical therapy profession with the fitness industry. After 25 years as a physical therapist, she had listened many times as her clients voiced their needs, and this particular need was at the top of the list. In 2003, she drew the equity out of her home to finance the start-up of a specialty gym staffed with medical professionals. A highly successful business, the RehabGYM in Williston meets the need by offering rehabilitative and fitness programs to people of all ages and abilities.

For outstanding leadership related to her company's staying power, employee growth, increase in sales, innovative ingenuity and contributions to the community, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has selected **Sharon Gutwin, owner and founder of the RehabGYM in Williston and Colchester**, as the **2008 Vermont Small Business Person of the Year**.

"I'm honored to have been selected for this award, and I'm even more impressed with the SBA in their choice of a health care business," Gutwin said. "As health care begins to function like other industries, it encourages the kind of competition that spurs innovation, efficiency and productivity. If we continue in that direction, I'm sure we'll see positive changes in not only the health care industry, but also in the health of the general population. It's an important shift because, as populations continue to age, proactive health care will be far more affordable than trying to regain your health after it's lost. My business is trying to go proactive, and I really appreciate being recognized for our success."

The RehabGYM began as a start-up with two full-time staff members and one part-time employee, based on a payroll of \$63,000. Custom-designed by Gutwin, the 4,200 sq. ft. Williston facility included a rubber-floored unit with gym and therapeutic exercise equipment; a separate unit with a floating hardwood floor for sport-specific drills, agility and balance training; and a therapeutic pool.

A year after opening, the RehabGYM's clientele had tripled in size and the staff had more than doubled to a total of 10 employees. Services included rehabilitation programs, fitness and wellness consultations; progressive athletic training services; purpose-driven exercise classes, and community offerings such as tri-annual blood drives, community fundraising runs, and free community lectures.

By 2006, the RehabGYM was bursting at the seams with a growing number of clients and a staff of 15 full-time employees. Gutwin opened a temporary, additional site at a nearby physician's office building and began to plot a path toward permanent expansion.

Her previous success had allowed her to pay back her home equity, but she didn't have sufficient personal funds to cover the cost of expansion.

However, with an SBA loan processed through the Vermont 504 Corporation, Gutwin was able to fund a second, permanent site in 2007. The new 11,800 sq. ft. Colchester facility is modeled after the Williston design but includes two custom-built therapeutic pools, a climbing wall, three private treatment rooms, an exercise studio, a small retail section and an innovative Kids RehabGYM. With the new construction, the RehabGYM's total employment increased to 25 and the annual payroll topped \$800,000.

As Vermont's Small Business Person of the Year, Sharon Gutwin will compete for the national title at Small Business Week ceremonies in Washington, D.C., April 21-25, 2008. She will be locally honored for her accomplishments by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) at a special ceremony presented by the *Vermont Business Magazine*. The event will take place on the shores of Lake Champlain at Burlington's Waterfront Park, June 4, 2008, 4:00 -7:00 p.m. The public is invited. To register, call 802-865-5202 or e-mail info@delaneymeetingevent.com. The cost is \$35 a person.

Also receiving awards at the ceremony will be:

Coco Dowley

Coco's Frame Shop and Gallery
Vermont Microenterprise Award

Colleen Montague

Vermont Agency of Transportation DBE Program Manager
Women in Business Champion of the Year

Don Padgett

Central Vermont Community Action Council
Financial Services Champion

Bruce Seel and Ted Goulette

Reynolds and Son, Inc.
Jeffrey Butland Family-Owned Small Business of the Year

John ("Jack") Chase Thurston

Features Reporter, WCAX-TV
Small Business Journalist of the Year

Michael Valentine

PEG-TV
Veteran Small Business Champion